

A Valentine for Miss Eddy

Alligators; said Miss Eddy, our second grade teacher,
referring to babies,
and made it seem like final exams addressing valentines;
Scriggly and slimy

But never green
Johnny Lastrow raised his hand

Betsy Green's new sister is green.

And so we get on with exams, wiping our pens with paper
lace
and botching the capital letters
and daring only occasionally to glance at the sun filter-
ing through the talc on Miss Eddy's chinwhiskers

How do you spell violent?

VIOLETS Susan. Violets-are-blue
blue, blue, purple with holding cold hands under water
petals that huddle under umbrellas in the dark woods
by water
spring after spring

No I mean violent
like when you violent a rule

It is time for our spelling lesson, says Miss Eddy and
brings a book sharply down on her own finger
For spelling you line up against the blackboard
we'll play it like war
I'll shoot the words:
machinegunned faster than we can spin violent violet
violate inviolate

(Can you get unvalentined?)

You just died, Sammy: valentine valid invalid invalid
validate villify verify verity vindicate vanquish
vex vent vaunt vain valve valley valve vamp vampire

Why don't we start with A-for-alligator
says Betsy Green

Betsy you're dead
The blackboard riveted with shells of our failures.

Miss Eddy with the exactness of an x-acto knife pronounces our whole class Mort.

Dead.

Get on with the valentines.

The sun bounces off Miss Eddy's blonde fuzz
but cannot re-yellow a daffodil stuck in a glass on
her desk with no water.

Mrs Higgenbotham's Quest

Mrs. Higgenbotham searched for herself all day long
first behind the greenhouse door then under the
shelves in the library
and finally in her closet.

She unzipped two pink flowered dressbags and shook out
chiffon dresses printed with pink geraniums;
not even a speck of lint
fluttered to the floor
to remind her she had worn them;
or a moth;
or its eggs.

Wrenching open the glass door to the livingroom she
found Mr. Higgenbotham
nodding over a brandy and the New York Times
his hands cupped like asters on his knees.

Roger Higgenbotham, she said, What do you mean by
drinking brandy at two in the afternoon?

Mr. Higgenbotham smiled beatifically and said I'm
taking the news dear
any harm in that?
and his chins slipped back to his paisley vest:
his afternoon recorded in the rose chintz chimes of
three French doors
leading out into the garden.

Mrs. Higgenbotham walked out into her garden
still searching
and sat on a stone bench surrounded by pink geraniums
nodding in the sun.

-- Virginia Saunders

Lincoln, Massachusetts